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SOUTH VIETNAM: The government's efforts to prevent Vice President Ky from qualifying as a presidential candidate are casting new doubts on whether both Ky and Big Minh will make the race.

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[REDACTED] President Thieu is doing everything possible to prevent Ky from obtaining the necessary 100 endorsements from provincial councilors. Government officials reportedly are effectively combining intimidation and material inducements to persuade the councilors not to sign for Ky.

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Ky himself apparently remains optimistic that he will be on the ballot, probably because of an agreement with Big Minh's camp under which provincial councilors sympathetic to Minh would endorse the vice president.

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[REDACTED] plans to have An Quang councilors nominate Ky are running into trouble because Ky's unpopularity among the Buddhists makes it difficult to ask them to pretend to support him in order to help Minh. The vice president presumably would draw votes away from Thieu.

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The prospect that Ky may not qualify reportedly is causing Minh to have second thoughts about entering the contest. Minh's resolve to run has wavered in the past because of his concern over the fairness of the election; some of his supporters believe that if the government's tactics keep Ky off the ballot, Minh will decide to withdraw in the belief that he has no chance to win.

Thieu apparently is aware of the possibility that both Minh and Ky will drop out of the contest. The President reportedly has ordered province chiefs to solicit blank endorsements from councilors which

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could be used to nominate some other candidate if necessary to give the appearance of a fair election. Since Minh and Ky are the only credible challengers to the President, however, Thieu would undoubtedly come in for heavy criticism from within South Vietnam as well as from abroad if both drop out of the race.

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SOUTH KOREA: President Pak Chong-hui is again being advised by certain top aides to take a new initiative on unification.

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[REDACTED] is urging the President to propose direct contact between the North and South Korean Red Cross societies through the good offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross in order to arrange for an exchange of names and addresses of refugees and divided families. [REDACTED] if the North Koreans accept, this could be followed by an exchange of mail, athletes, artists, and news publications. Eventually there could be economic and political contacts between the North and South.

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Pak is unlikely to accept such a far-reaching proposal in its entirety, although he may decide to make some public gesture on the unification issue before the expected UN debate of the Korean question later this year. Although all Koreans favor reunification in principle, public fear and resentment against the North is strong in the South, and Pak will move cautiously in order not to alarm the many South Koreans who oppose any form of compromise with the Communists. Pak last year rejected similar advice that he call for an exchange of mail, athletes, and newsmen with the North.

Pak reportedly favors a gradual relaxation of Seoul's rigid prohibition against all contacts with the North in order to bring South Korean policy more into line with the worldwide easing of East-West tensions. Last summer Pak, in a clear attempt to seize the propaganda initiative from Pyongyang, called for a lifting of the barriers that divide Korea and promised to drop South Korea's opposition to North Korean participation in the annual UN debate on Korea. He insisted, however, that Pyongyang

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acknowledge UN competence to deal with the question. His overture was couched in terms likely to be rejected by Pyongyang, but the speech nevertheless was a distinct policy departure and marked the beginning of an effort to project a more flexible image.

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NOTES

ARAB STATES: Syria's efforts to restrict fedayeen activities in its territory have drawn a public complaint from Fatah.

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authorities in Damascus recently confiscated a number of armored personnel carriers that were part of a shipment of arms to Fatah. The commando group has since been quoted by a Lebanese newspaper as claiming that the arms included 200 tanks and some troop carriers from Communist China.

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Damascus is reportedly concerned that the fedayeen may seek to establish an enclave in Syrian territory to replace their lost bases in Jordan.

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